

CHINESE ARTISTIC CONCEPTION IN CHINESE INK- WASH ANIMATION: WANDERING-VIEWING AND MIRRORING- DRIFTING

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Abstract

This study explored Chinese artistic conception ("*yi jing*", 意境) in Chinese ink-wash animation through wandering-viewing ("*you guan*", 游观) and mirroring-drifting ("*jing you*", 镜游). Focusing on the dimensions of camera movement, subject movement, frame composition, and editing rhythm, qualitative comparative formal analysis of six representative works revealed the expression of Chinese artistic conception through not just ink style alone but also the coordinated realisation of spatial openness, rhythmic vitality, drifting visual guidance, and durational pacing. Framework incorporating wandering-viewing and mirroring-drifting provided clear explanation on the translation of traditional Chinese aesthetic logic into moving-image form. This study posited that the aesthetic strength of Chinese ink-wash animation extends beyond technical spectacle, including its ability to sustain drifting attention, spatial openness, rhythmic vitality, and temporal continuity. This study also provided a creative guidance framework for future analysis and practice.

Keywords: Chinese artistic conception; Chinese ink-wash animation; Chinese school of animation; Wandering-viewing; Mirroring-drifting

Introduction

As an aesthetic theory, Chinese artistic conception (“*yi jing*”, 意境) represents art forms like calligraphy, painting, and poetry, emphasising the harmony of internal emotions with the external world. Its core resides not just in the visual perception but also emotional resonance. As Zong Baihua theorised, artistic conception embodies sensory perception in deep spiritual realm, providing insights on the extensive connection between human emotions and the essence of the universe (Baihua and De Meyer, 2017).

In recent years, globalisation and technological developments have led to numerous new creative genres. With its transition from cel-based 2D animation to 3D computer animation and from classical shadow puppetry to contemporary 4D cinema, Chinese animation is now prepared to use AI-driven animation technology. Nevertheless, the possible loss of Chinese aesthetics in the pursuit of advanced technologies leads to a state of cultural anxiety (Wu, 2017; Wu and Wang, 2020; Fan and Feng, 2021).

The current study contended that, irrespective of technological advancements or the development of artistic tools and media, it is imperative for artists to have an extensive awareness of Chinese philosophy, which is based on the fundamental principles of Chinese artistic conception. This would allow them to produce art works that adhere to the core principles of Chinese aesthetics, rather than deviating in their pursuit of advanced technologies. With that, this study explored selected works to better understand spatial creation and spiritual rhythm through Chinese ink-wash animation.

Chinese Artistic Conception

Beneath the apparent multiplicity of forms lies an integral order in which the self and the world, the subject and the object, and the mind and the things are not separable but mutually generative (Fuguan and Jingshen, 2007). The development

and appreciation of artworks have also been guided by a several-thousand-year profound Daoist philosophy, as evidenced by the explicitly aesthetic philosophical tendencies in the Tang and Song dynasties. As an aesthetic articulation of an ontological worldview grounded in the Daoist logic of unity, Chinese artistic conception emerges as a major category in calligraphy, painting, poetry, and other art forms.

Taking Shitao (1642–1708) as an example, he radicalised a logic in the theory of single stroke (“*yi hua*”)—“*10,000 brush-strokes return to one stroke*”. According to this Chinese painter and theorist whose innovative approach significantly shaped the art conception of the Qing dynasty (Man, 2020), this logic should not be understood as a mere technical brush method, as this also serves as an originary creative principle that posits the unfolding of one into many and the gathering of many into the one. Through Shitao’s dynamic brushwork, fluid ink movement, and spatial composition, his proposition of “*no rule is the ultimate rule*” reflected the inherent emergence of the highest artistic order from the living rhythm of creation, instead of external prescription (Yihan, 1964; Chai, 2021; Wu, 2025). Instead of mechanically imitating nature, his artworks reflected its inner spirit and rhythmic vitality. The Chinese ink wash animation of *Feeling from Mountain and Water* (Te et al., 1988; Chen, 2022) extensively adopted and continued the visual and compositional techniques of his classic Chinese landscape painting.

Similarly, Wang Guowei’s work of *Remarks on Poetry in the Human World* (“*ren jian ci hua*”) provided an aesthetic and philosophical exploration of the relationship between the individual and the universe. The work’s achievement of “*jing jie*” (境界) has been frequently used in the description of the spiritual, intellectual, or aesthetic depth or state (Shen, 1994; Hongmei, 2023). Instead of mechanically combining emotion and scenery, a world in which these elements are internally fused is formed, whether in the world with the self (personal inscape) and the world without the self

(impersonal inscape) (Wang, 2002; Kuang, 2011; Dadejik et al., 2022; Huang, 2023).

Zheng Zhengqiu's earliest aesthetic framework centred on air (*"kong"*, 空), rhythm (*"qi"*, 气), and assimilation (*"tong hua"*). It was argued that a holistic atmospheric realm should be constructed for a film to emotionally assimilate the viewers, rather than merely pursuing narrative or dramatic utility (Jia, 2022). Fei Mu expanded this idea profoundly through the elevation of *"kong"* into core cinematic aesthetic emphasising the harmony of emotion, image, and rhythm for a meditative, immersive viewing state (Wang, 2013; Ng, 2020; Li, 2023). Through the interrelation of *"kong"* and *"qi"* across different art forms, Zong Baihua's aesthetics framed Chinese artistic conception. Zong Baihua highlighted sensory emotion, vitality of life, and the highest spiritual realm as key stages of multifaceted creativity in artistic conception, which was clearly not a superficial imitation of the physical world (Baihua and De Meyer, 2017; Baihua, 2023b).

When it comes to *"kong"*, its reference to emptiness in the sense of absence, as well as spatial openness and the balance of positive and negative space establishes it as an important artistic ideal linked to spatial creation and Chinese spatial consciousness (Guang, 2015; Woon et al., 2022; Baihua, 2023a; Li, 2023; Wenfu and Wei, 2023). Meanwhile, *"qi"*, which is expressed in art as vivid charm, movement, and spiritual rhythm (*"qi yun"*, 气韵) to convey vitality, refers to the vital breath or energetic flow of life (Rošker, 2020; Wang, 2022). Together, *"kong"* and *"qi"* shape Chinese artistic conception by allowing the artist to create an imagined space of emptiness animated by inner life-force, through which personal feeling, the essence of phenomena, and a broader perception of the universe are aesthetically unified (Lai, 1999; Yu and Xu, 2009; Xu, 2010; Culham et al., 2020; Rošker, 2020).

Chinese Ink-Wash Animation: Chinese School of Animation

The timeline of Chinese school of animation was between the 1950s and 1980s. During this period, a unique style of animation using traditional Chinese traditional painting techniques or known as Chinese ink-wash animation emerged (Wu, 2009; Huang, 2022). Its emphasis on traditional Chinese artistic techniques and aesthetics (Giesen, 2014) is profoundly ingrained in China's cultural heritage (Wu, 2009). Animation and painting share the same objective—to create visuals. However, unlike painting that encapsulates a specific scene, emotion, or moment in time with a fixed representation, animation provides an illustration of motion and transformation across time. The core concepts of painting is enhanced in animation through the use of individual frames or "paintings" that creates the illusion of movement (Bendazzi, 2015). Chinese traditional paintings were historically intended to be "read", with each section offering a distinct perspective or focus point, creating a fluid viewing experience known as drifting (Elkins, 2010; Wang and Cai, 2019; Liang, 2022). From the scattered perspective, the camera or frame movements in Chinese school of animation display their own calligraphic approaches (Chong, 2007; Wells et al., 2008; Chen, 2024), which emulate the experience of viewing classical Chinese artwork in scroll form, in contrast to the central viewpoint characteristic of Western art (Chen, 2017; Liu, 2025). The camera or frame movements approach can be associated with Lin Niantong's theory of mirroring-drifting (*"jing you"*, 镜游).

Wandering-Viewing ("You Guan")

Classical Chinese painting, especially in the handscroll format, is structured as a gradual and mobile process of visual "reading", in which the viewer encounters the image through shifting viewpoints, rather than from a single fixed position (McCausland, 2023). Grounded in the scattered perspective, such viewing mode (Bush, 1998; Elkins, 2010) differs from the Western optical and geometric perspective due to

its emphasis on Chinese aesthetic values, philosophical reflection, and artistic imagination over scientific realism (Yin, 2021; Zhu, 2024). Instead of imitating nature photographically, the scattered perspective highlights the organic relationship between part and whole, resonating with Shen Kuo's idea of perceiving the part from the totality, while spatial arrangement follows emotion, rhythm, and spiritual expression, instead of strict mathematical rules (Shen, 1994; Shao, 1996; Dongsheng, 2015; Lukicheva, 2020; Guan, 2024).

As seen in picture scrolls and handscrolls, this format allows the viewer's gaze to move freely across multiple shifting viewpoints, creating a continuous, fluid, and interpretive mode of seeing described as wandering-viewing ("*you guan*", 游观) (Humble, 1984; Yin, 2021; Wang and Wang, 2021; Baihua, 2023a; Baihua, 2023b; Xu, 2023; Wu, 2023; Erjavec, 2024). Wandering-viewing refers to the representation of the outer physical world, as well as the reveal of significant meanings and the fusion of atmosphere, emotion, scene, and spiritual resonance through space and rhythm, transforming abstract concepts into concrete, sensory imagery (Zhu, 2020; Hongmei, 2023). More importantly, wandering-viewing is not limited to painting alone but remains fundamental to Chinese artistic conception across calligraphy, film, garden design, painting, sculpture, and many other art forms, making drifting ("*you*", 游) as a reflection of the vivid charm of spirit and rhythm as a vital principle in Chinese art (Zhu, 2020; Liu, 2023).

Point-of-view (POV) and viewer attention were substantially explored in prior Western film studies through editing and camera movement. Shaped by relational components and varied formal patterns, POV was postulated by Branigan as a complex narrative structure, not solely a character's visual imitation, forming subjectivity through editing and narration, instead of fixed optical equivalence (Branigan, 2012; Cannavò et al., 2024). Based on this proposition, camera movement, cuts, editing rhythm, framing, and shot scale were explored

in cognitive and empirical studies, including eye-tracking research, and found to systematically guide the viewer's visual attention, beyond stylistic choices, to function as perceptual and attentional mechanisms (Smith and Henderson, 2008; Magliano and Zacks, 2011; Paci, 2025). Other prior studies on attentional continuity theory, edit blindness, event segmentation, and the Scene Perception & Event Comprehension Theory (SPECT) framework further revealed the roles of continuity editing in directing attention, organising event comprehension, and integrating perceptual and narrative processing (Smith, 2012; Bruckert et al., 2023). However, most of these robust empirical studies focused on live-action cinema. There have been limited and fragmented animation-specific research, with less emphasis on classical editing and camera movement systems.

Mirroring-Drifting ("Jing You")

In film study, Fei Mu's "*kong*" and "*qi*" theory established the foundational aesthetic of Chinese cinematic poetry by emphasising that cinematic aesthetics should not rely on direct emotional expression but on constructing permeable, holistic aesthetic space through the camera itself, the filmed subjects or objects themselves, indirect suggestion, and sound or acoustics (Wang, 2013; Ng, 2020; Duan, 2021).

Based on classical Chinese landscape painting, scattered perspective, and early Chinese film aesthetics, Lin Niantong systematically theorised the concept of mirroring-drifting, which adapted the drifting mode of viewing in traditional Chinese painting into cinematic language by treating filmic space as dynamic, mobile, and rhythmically unfolding, rather than fixed or static (Niantong, 1987; Niantong, 1991; Chudian, 2016; Ding, 2024). Within this framework, there are three central interrelated principles: (1) viewing scenes through movement (以动观景), in which the camera moves, pans, drifts, or follows the subjects to simulate the roaming gaze of wandering-viewing and guide the viewer through space (Fan, 2016; Purtle, 2018), (2) integrating time into spatial composition (以时率

空), in which space is gradually formed through duration, long takes, static shots, and temporal unfolding, rather than presented instantaneously (Jiang, 2001; Quanjin and Simatrang, 2024), and (3) creating scattered compositions (以散构形), which draws on the multipoint or scattered perspective of Chinese painting, arranging characters, landscapes, and objects across varied positions and distances within the frame (Wenfu & Wei, 2023).

With the focus on camera movement, frame composition, and editing rhythm, the distinct Chinese mode of cinematic space is formed based on the three aforementioned principles, emphasising the elements of mobility, temporality, layered spatial perception, and the expressive spirit of artistic conception (Cheng, 2008; Chunfang, 2013; Li, 2023). Lam Nintung's concept of mirroring-drifting highlighted camera movement in Chinese cinema as more than just a technical device to display action; it spatialises perception. In the translated version of *Spatialising Consciousness of Chinese Cinema*, Lam discussed Chinese filmmakers' use of layering views of reality onto a two-dimensional (2D) frame, which reshaped the relationship between the spectator's body and the image (Huang, 2014; Fan, 2016; Udden, 2016; Nin-tung et al., 2024). However, Lam's lack of specific practical or theoretical elaborations on the theory of mirroring-drifting for concrete cinematic techniques made it challenging to grasp the theory's direct influence on the technical aspects of filmmaking, such as frame composition (e.g., how elements are arranged within a shot) or editing rhythm (e.g., the pace and flow of cuts between shots).

Camera Movement

The arrangement of visual framing and mirroring-drifting convey Chinese artistic conception. As a visual equivalent of wandering-viewing, camera movement constitutes panning, tilting, zooming, and composite movements, revealing space and offering rhythmically unfolding field of perception that guides the viewer's gaze. More than just recording

function, camera movement was described by Chen (2024) as aesthetic and narrational force. The vitality, subjectivity, and rhythmic flow of cinematic images are produced through the moving lens.

The close relationship between camera movement in 2D ink-wash animation and the preservation of Chinese artistic conception has been highlighted in various studies. For instance, Chen (2020) argued that the aesthetic spirit of traditional ink-painting animation can be better retained through 2D movement but weakened by rapid rotational 3D movement. Likewise, Yu (2023) highlighted the consistency of Chinese artistic conception with slow, static, tracking, and smooth panning shots combined with multifocal and non-anthropomorphic perspectives. According to Cores-Sarria (2024), viewers' perceptions of space and immersion are shaped by camera framing. Meanwhile, Jamasbi et al. (2024) posited that narrative meaning, emotional expression, and visual poetry are better supported through 2D or virtual camera movement. These studies similarly described camera movement in 2D ink-wash animation as a significant aesthetic device that conveys spatial rhythm and artistic conception, more than just technicality.

In 2D Chinese ink-wash animation, camera movement is predominantly planar, with most lens motion proceeding horizontally, vertically, or diagonally. Depth is often suggested through layered planes moving at different speeds, rather than through full 360-degree volumetric camerawork. Accordingly, this study classified frame movement into static shots, pan shots, tilt shots, zoom shots, and several compound planar pan-tilt variants, including diagonal, circular/turning, free-style, and other combined movements. Figure 1 depicts various 2D camera movements. Taken together, these shot types fall primarily within the logic of 2D planar camera movement rather than volumetric 3D camerawork (Patterson & Willis, 1994; Lamarre, 2009; Jew, 2013; Cao et al., 2017; Chambless, 2022; Jamasbi et al., 2024).

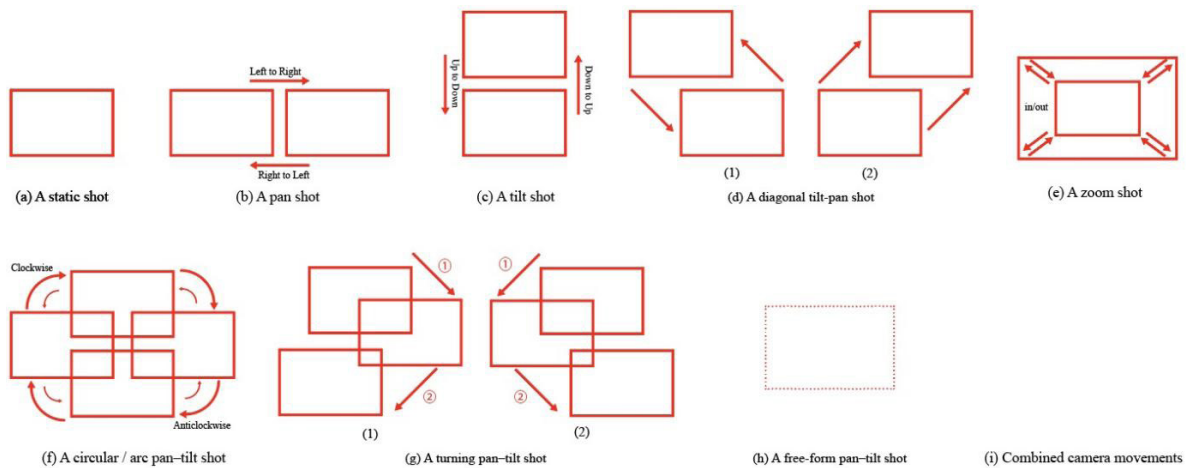


Fig. 1 2D planar camera movement

Subject Movement

Apart from its planar reading and mirroring-drifting style in cinematic language, Chinese school of animation utilises the animation of subject to convey the vivid charm of the animation's spirit and rhythm (Au, 2014; Liu, 2021). Subject movement in this study referred to the motion, gesture, rhythm, and dynamic presence of all animated entities within the frame, including human figures, animals, plants, water, clouds, wind, and props. Subject movement can be examined through two related dimensions.

The first dimension is the subject–path movement. Although this exact term of subject–path movement is not commonly standardised in animation scholarship, related studies showed that movement within the frame can guide the spectator's gaze through drifting spatial perception, attentional synchrony, and motion-based visual clustering, especially when camera movement and onscreen motion are coordinated in 2D screen space (Nin-tung et al., 2024; Jiang, 2024; Chen, 2025). In Chinese ink-wash animation, subject–path movement may be understood as the coordinated planar displacement of onscreen elements and camera movement, which leads the viewer's gaze in a drifting mode of observation,

producing a “wandering-viewing” mode of perception comparable to the Chinese concept of wandering-viewing (Fan, 2016; Chen, 2020; Yu, 2023; Lam, 2024).

The second dimension is performative subject movement, which refers to the expressive actions, postures, rhythms, and dynamic performances of characters and other on-screen subjects. Early classical Chinese animation often adopted stylised movements and poses derived from traditional Chinese opera, which were particularly evident in fight scenes (Chen, 2017). Ying (2022) further pointed out that the action design in *The Proud General* (Te & Li, 1956) followed the stylised performance conventions of Peking Opera, and that motion performance itself was deemed integral to the construction of a “national style”. (Lv et al., 2023) also described Monkey King's movements in *Havoc in Heaven* (Wan & Tang, 1964) to be rooted in opera action. Taking on the perspective of “suspended animation”, Du (2022) described stillness, reduced motion, and arrested poses in Chinese animation as meaningful expressive strategies that enhanced authority, contemplativeness, and visual tension, not mere “absence of movement”. Meanwhile, contemporary Chinese animation more often adopts realistic and exaggerated action style

influenced by the 12 Principles of Animation (Du, 2022; Wei, 2024; Wei et al., 2025).

This study emphasised subject–path movement, with particular attention to wandering-viewing and mirroring-drifting as camera movement aesthetics. Performative subject movement was not a central concern in this study.

Frame Composition

Frame composition in Chinese ink-wash animation can be understood not only through conventional animation shot scales but also through spatial consciousness inherited from Chinese painting. The close, medium, and wide shots organise visual distance and guide viewer's attention, while "three distances" in Chinese painting provide a deeper aesthetic framework for spatial construction (Fan, 2024; Li, 2024). Guo Xi's theory of steep distance ("*gao yuan*", 高远), deep distance ("*shen yuan*", 深远), and horizontal distance ("*ping yuan*", 平远) emphasised vertical height, layered depth, and lateral expansiveness, respectively (Jiang, 2012; Liu et al., 2024; Zhu, 2024). The later painting theory also described close view, distant view, and meditative distance, which moved from the perception of nearby forms to remote landscapes and finally, to an imaginative realm beyond visible space (Jiang & Zhu, 2018; Chen & Zhao, 2024). These concepts are translated into frame composition in Chinese ink-wash animation. In particular, close shots typically reflect the close view, while medium shots link the foreground with the background. Through the wide shots, the display of atmospheric depth, blankness, and openness forms distant or even meditative space. Beyond the basic technical arrangement of these shots, the visual principles of Chinese painting profoundly shape the frame aesthetics of Chinese ink-wash animation, as these shots create composition that reflects spatial and poetic expression of Chinese artistic conception (Wang, 2016; Xu, 2020; Baihua, 2023b).

The key fundamental of all these lies in the scattered perspective. Instead of focusing on a single stable viewpoint within a frame, the scattered perspective creates a drifting and exploratory mode of seeing, directing the viewer's gaze to move freely across varied image positions, scales, and layers (Baihua, 2015; Baihua & De Meyer, 2017; Wu, 2023). Such mobility does not imply visual disorder. This arrangement relies on the clear main–secondary relations; this is where the sight is guided by the composition through key focal elements, and the spatial atmosphere ("*kong*") is enriched with surrounding elements.

The balance between virtual (虚) and real (实) (or emptiness and substantiality) represents another key principle. Varied brushstroke thickness, ink intensity, and spatial openness in Chinese calligraphy and scroll painting convey form and the energetic presence–absence relation (Wang et al., 2020; Zhang, 2021b; Hongmei, 2023). In relation to that, this "intended blankness" ("*liu bai*", 留白) refers to an active spatial and imaginative field and does not suggest emptiness in a passive sense (Zhang, 2021a). The use of blank background, mist, cloud, water, soft tonal transition, and minimal pictorial details in Chinese ink-wash animation creates the same effects. With such effects, the frame displays invisible extension, atmosphere, and inner resonance, even when not every element is explicitly depicted. Based on the principle of "convergence and divergence" ("*ju san*"), visual elements either form a concentrated focal area or disperse into spacious openness. Through such compositional treatment, the interplays of lines, dots, ink density, and contrasts between thick and light ink are leveraged to depict mountain structures, scenic rhythm, and the expansion or contraction of pictorial energy (Poškaitė, 2017; Qu, 2022; Feifei et al., 2024).

In Chinese ink-wash animation, the underlying aesthetic logic of painting is adapted into moving images. Frame composition is how artistic conception, breath, mood, and space are articulated through the scattered perspective, clear focal

hierarchy, the interplay of virtual and real, the rhythm of convergence and divergence, and the vivid charm of spirit and rhythm. In other words, the aesthetics of frame composition in Chinese ink-wash animation should be understood as a cinematic continuation of Chinese painting's spatial imagination and as a visual embodiment of Chinese artistic conception.

Editing Rhythm

The general film theory described the regulation of narration's spatiotemporal continuity and the compression, expansion, or preservation of the perceived duration of events as part of editing functions. Editing's effects on how long a scene feels and how strongly a scene can be experienced have been empirically proved (Liapi et al., 2024; Pearlman, 2025). In Chinese filmmaking, time is viewed from a Daoist ontology of relational generation, rhythmic breathing, and field interaction; rather than linear event progression, the cyclical flow, atmospheric duration, and the mutual responsiveness of characters, space, and audiovisual rhythm create temporality (Liu, 2025; Wang & Lin, 2023).

Feng (2023) argued the propensity of martial arts films influenced by Daoist aesthetics in embracing inner follow and energetic resonance over overt external conflict, which profoundly influences cinematic temporality. Such orientation is closely related to Chinese artistic conception and to what Duan (2021) identified as the "empty shot", in reference to a distinct Chinese philosophically influenced cinematic device, instead of establishing shot or cutaway. The empty shots are leveraged to fuse feeling and scenery, embodying the interplay of virtual and real, and circulate rhythmic vitality through atmosphere, sound, and temporal suspension. Yu (2023) similarly pointed out the reliance of cinematic ideorealm on empty shots, long duration, long shots, long takes, minimalism, slowness, and stillness; all of these allow the viewers to immerse themselves in an expanded spatiotemporal field, rather than simply processing plot information (Duan 2021; Feng 2023; Wang & Lin, 2023; Yu, 2023). These studies

shared a similar stance on Daoist editing rhythm; instead of seeking rapid clarification, dramatic compression, or continuous intensification, its depiction of temporal openness, ellipsis, intentional blankness, and continuity of atmosphere produces shots that gradually unfold breathe and spaces. Based

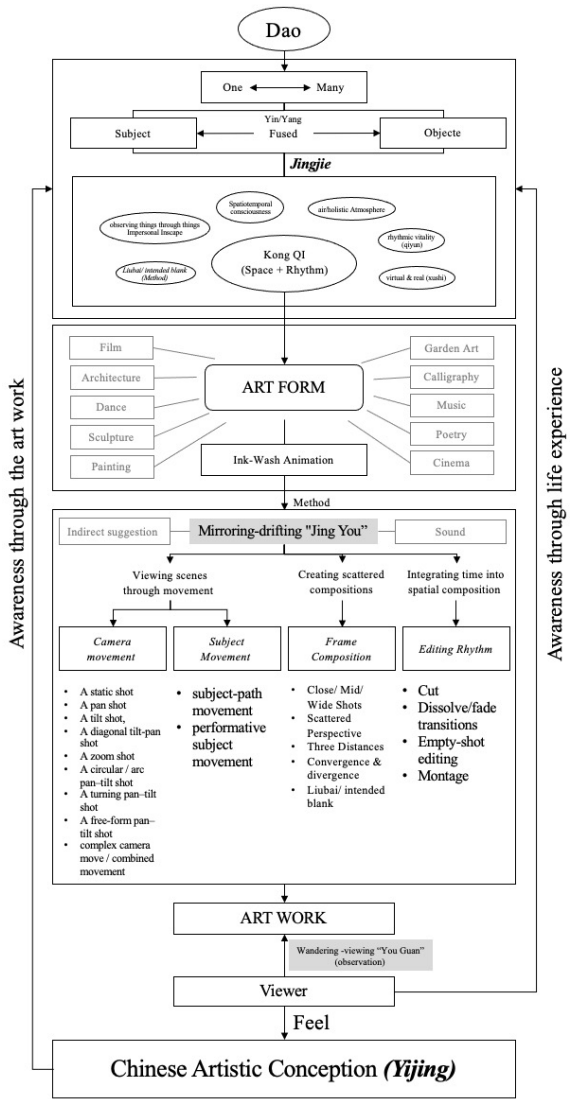


Fig. 2 Conceptual Framework of the Study

on this proposition, editing serves less as a tool of narrative acceleration than as a means.

The conceptual framework of this study (Figure 2) depicts the shift from Dao as the ontological ground of unity to “*jing jie*” as aesthetic realisation, “*kong*” and “*qi*” as the mediating principles of space and rhythm, and finally, wandering-viewing and mirroring-drifting as perceptual and cinematic processes, through which this logic is translated into moving-image form. This study’s conceptual framework was operationalised through four analytical dimensions, namely camera movement, subject–path movement, frame composition, and editing rhythm, which established the underlying basis for the study’s film analysis.

Methodology

This study adopted qualitative comparative multiple-case study design to examine how mirroring-drifting is realised in Chinese ink-wash animation. Instead of quantitatively measuring viewers’ responses, this study focused on exploring the formal organisation of animated films and interpreting how specific visual strategies construct drifting perception, spatial rhythm, and Chinese artistic conception (Gustafsson, 2017; Taherdoost, 2022). Purposive criterion-based sampling strategy was employed to select representative Chinese ink-wash animated works. During the golden age of the Chinese school of animation, ink-wash animation was developed as a distinctive aesthetic and philosophical form. In the contemporary 3D era, ink-wash animation has become increasingly rare, appearing mainly in short-form works, with virtually no feature-length productions (Shen, 2014; Wei et al., 2023; Li Jin et al., 2024). For this reason, the earlier period provided the most substantial body of materials through which the aesthetic principles and cinematic logic of ink-wash animation can be meaningfully examined.

The selected films had to meet three criteria: (1) belong to the category of Chinese ink-wash animation; (2) contain a recognisable narrative or story structure; (3) representative works within their period. Based on these criteria, six films were selected: *Little Tadpoles Search for Mama* (Te et al., 1960); *The Cowboy’s Flute* (Te & Qian, 1963); *The Deer’s Bell* (Cheng & Qiang, 1982); *Feeling from Mountain and Water* (Te et al., 1988); *Boya’s Broken String* (Li, 2010); *Harvest* (Sun, 2020).

In order to identify the principles of Chinese artistic conception in Chinese ink animation, each ink-wash animation was examined through the dimensions of camera movement, subject movement, frame composition, and editing rhythm. Camera movement was analysed in terms of planar drifting and gaze guidance. Subject movement in this study focused on primarily on subject movement. Frame composition examined spatial organisation, scattered perspective, and the relation between virtual and real in this study. Meanwhile, editing rhythm was examined in terms of duration, long takes, empty shots, and temporal continuity. Through repeated viewing, note-taking, and comparison of selected sequences, the study identified how these formal dimensions would support or weaken the realisation of Chinese artistic conception across different ink-wash animations and historical periods.

Analysis

Camera Movement

Similar to traditional Chinese ink-wash paintings, Chinese ink-wash animation employs identical pictorial aesthetics in its visual composition. It simulates the way viewers observe traditional Chinese paintings through camera movement, as exemplified in Teiwei’s *Feeling from Mountain and Water*.

In the realm of animation cinematography, the concept of scatter perspective is primarily conveyed through camera movement. As shown in Figure 3, *Feeling from Mountain and Water* (Te et al., 1988) employed the theory of mirroring-drifting,

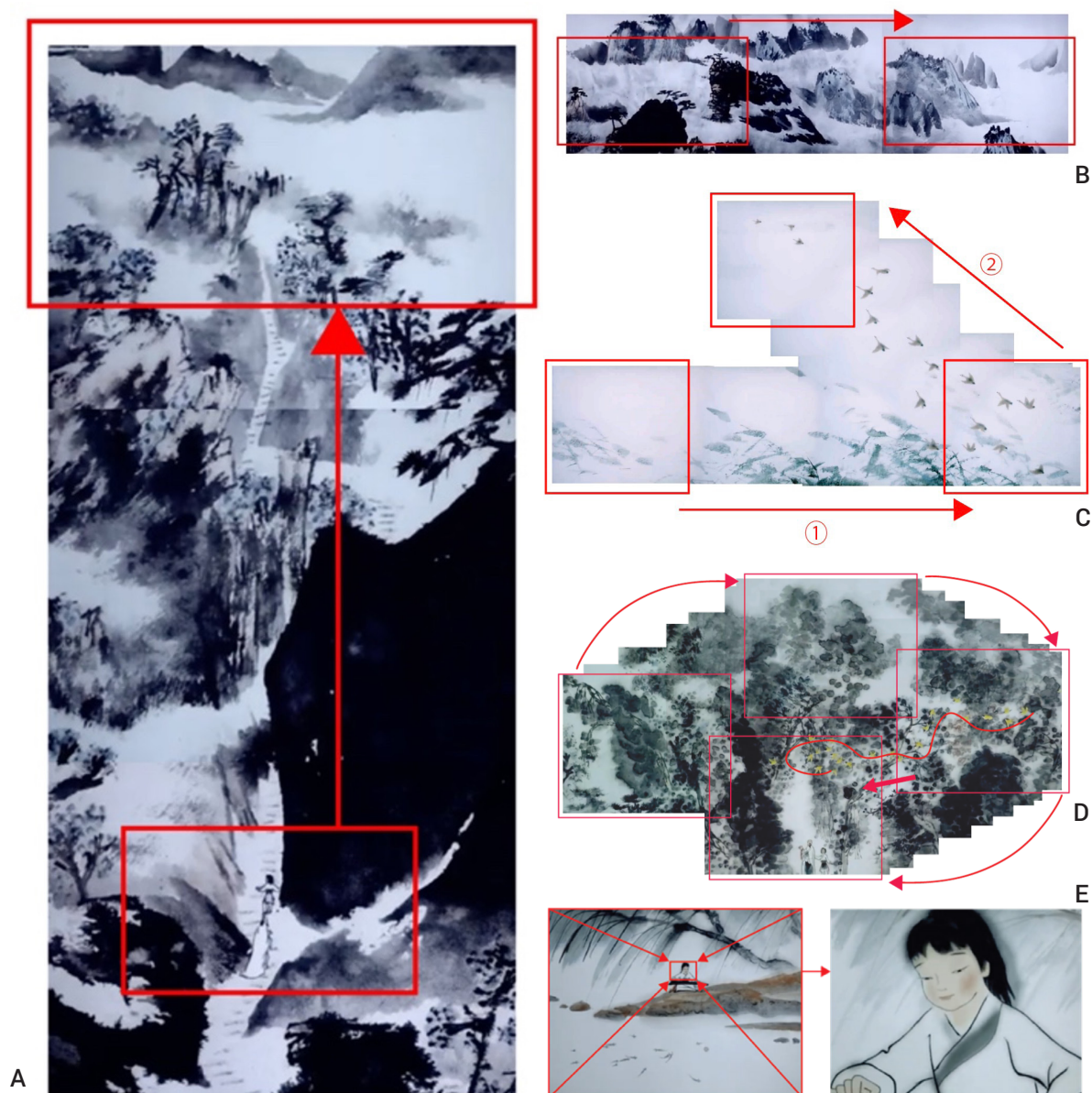


Fig. 3 2D planar camera movement in *Feeling from Mountain and Water*

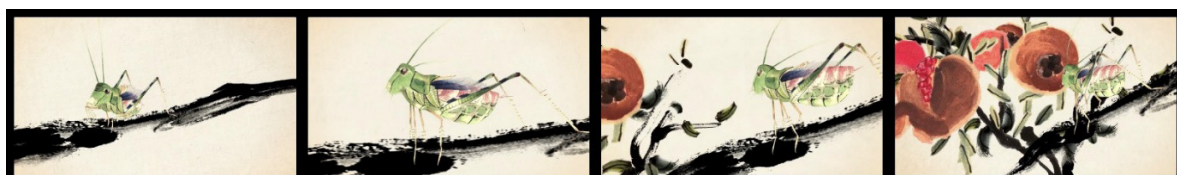


Fig. 4 360° arc shots in *Harvest* (2020)

which had similar composition with traditional Chinese paintings. Viewing scenes were captured through movement (以动观景) and creating scattered composition (以散构形).

As depicted in Figures 3(a) and 3(b), red rectangles and directional arrows highlight the sequences within the animated film frame, illustrating how the employed cinematographic techniques resemble those of traditional paintings. These clips frequently employed lateral or vertical panning, a technique that embodies the concept of drifting to provide viewers with “reading” cinematic experience. In addition, zooming in and out in Figure 6(e) represent another common technique. In certain cases, it is combined with other camera movements, as exemplified in Figure 3(a). Such combinations exhibit considerable diversity. Figures 3(c) and 3(d) show the turning tilt-pan and circular tilt-pan shots, providing viewing experience distinct from that of “reading”. Such technique bears resemblance to the horizontal, folded, and hooked brushstrokes in Chinese calligraphy. Panning from the aquatic plants on the left to the wild geese and then tilting upward to follow their flight, the visual flow was aligned with the natural viewing pattern of the human eye. Meanwhile, the birds in frame embodied the concept of “vivid charm”. Through the camera movement, viewers are visually guided through the animation scene with the sense of lively movement. With the combination of drifting spatial consciousness with spiritual rhythm (“qi yun”), profound artistic conception was achieved.

Besides that, the use of 360° arc shots in *Harvest* during the pivotal moment when the grasshopper discovered the fruit can be seen in Figure 4, reflecting commendable

experimental endeavour. However, the analysis of camera movement revealed the lack of any compositional elements to guide viewers’ attention within this sequence, with both grasshopper and tree branches being motionless, resulting in a jarring transition upon the reveal of the fruit. The use of 360° tracking shots in Chinese ink-wash animation called for further scholarly exploration.

Subject Movement

The use of characters as the main medium of visual guidance in Chinese ink-wash animation intends to direct viewers’ gaze towards any specific direction. Accordingly, there are two types of subject–path movement with distinct design logics and aesthetic effects, namely single-character and multi-character.

Linear movement can be eliminated through a character’s intentional subject–path movement, as the key driver of viewers’ gaze, and the wandering-viewing effect. Dominant design choices include curvilinear or circular paths, revealing sense of playfulness for the viewing experience and guiding the viewers’ sight rhythmically. As exemplified in Figure 5(a), the crab’s crawling movement in *Little Tadpoles Search for Mama*, was revealed in three curvilinear directional segments. This path design guided the viewer’s gaze with spatial sense of perspective—near objects appearing larger and far ones smaller—mimicking the fluid brushstrokes of Chinese calligraphy. Both rhythmic dynamics and spatial depth perception were integrated. In most cases, the coordination of camera movement with the character’s path often amplifies the visual effect. As shown in Figure 5(b), a three-stage progressive



Fig. 5 Subject-path movement in (a) *Little Tadpoles Search for Mama* and (b) *Feeling from Mountain and Water*

visual design reflected the aesthetic of spiritual distance. The reveal of the landscape with the right pan allowed viewers to appreciate the scenic space along the camera's trajectory. The subsequent appearance of an eagle led the viewers into this wandering viewing experience, unconsciously following its flight path. The circular flight of the eagle finally added visual playfulness into the frame.

Performative subject movement is non-goal-oriented with no fixed path. The character remains in a stationary or undirected state (e.g., resting in place) but is never completely motionless. Subtle movement is intentionally designed to extend the viewer's temporal and spatial perceptions. As illustrated in Figure 6, small actions like leg shaking lengthened the sense of time and space. This was followed by rapid sequential actions of gazing elsewhere and standing up, which transformed the character's non-goal-oriented state

into a seemingly purposeful one. Other examples of typical subtle movements include the rise and fall of the abdomen with breathing and gentle head swaying. Through such design strategy, the aesthetics of time integrated into spatial composition (以时率空) within the mirroring-drifting and wandering-viewing concepts are materialised. The fusion of temporal extension and spatial expression is mediated by subtle bodily dynamics.

Meanwhile, the core design principle of multi-subject-path movement lies in guiding viewers' gaze and temporal perceptions through varied camera movement dynamics. This typically applies to characters with independent paths (with no clear implied destination or motion path, remaining mostly stationary) or unified movement tendencies. Accordingly, there are independent goal-oriented movement, collective movement towards a shared destination, and stationary

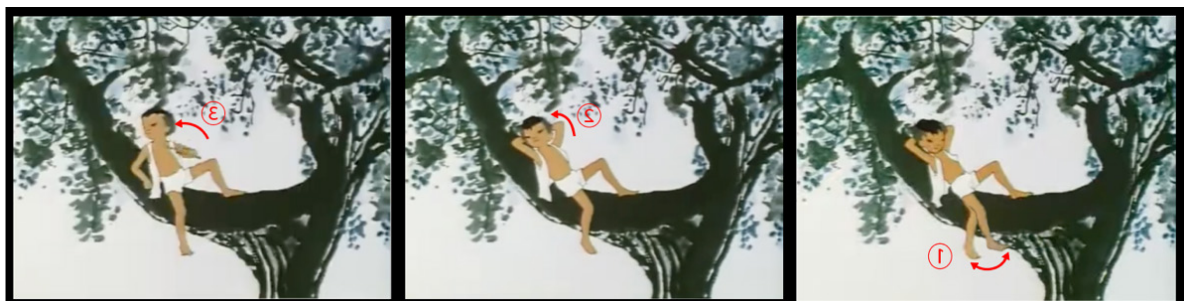


Fig. 6 Performative subject movement in *The Cowboy's Flute*

interaction (including coordinated, competitive, or aggregated movement). Multi-subject–path movement leverages differentiated character movements to produce layered visual experiences. This is depicted in Figure 7(a), where the viewers’ gaze was guided to the next scene through the flight of the bird and its swaying head. Temporal differentiation in movement serves as another key design element that shapes characters’ distinct personalities. For instance, with unique temporal rhythms, the staggered entrance of goldfishes in Figure 7(b) vividly reflected the individual traits of each goldfish. In practice, movement design for multi-character guidance should be tailored to the distinct personalities of each character, creating a more complex visual system; this was briefly outlined in this study for analytical purposes.

In the design of multi-subject–path movement and camera movement, excessive consistency diminishes visual

interest and results in the lack of narrative depth for the subjects. For example, as shown in Figure 8(a), a large flock of birds flew from the distance—growing in size and number, folding their wings, and descending from the sky to walk on the lawn on foot—while the camera panned diagonally downward in perfect coordination with their movement. In a second instance, Figure 7(b) depicts a flock of red-crowned cranes flying horizontally across a scene of distant mountains and nearby trees. Although the cranes flew in a staggered formation, the visual effect appeared overly flat. Furthermore, the speed of the camera’s pan shot was not differentiated from that of the cranes’ flight, leading to an overarching sense of uniformity between the camera movement and the motion of the subjects.

In summary, the subject–path movement in Chinese ink-wash animation constitutes the core of the **wandering-viewing**

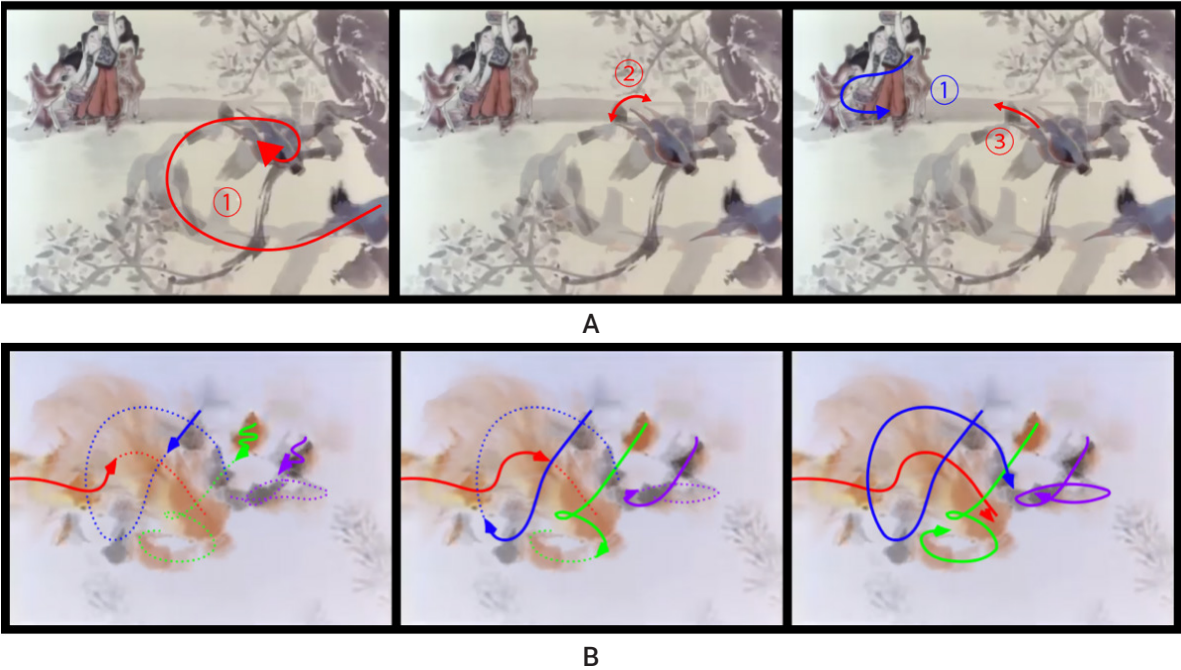


Fig. 7 Multi-subject–path movement with static camera movement

aesthetic, with diverse design strategies tailored to movement scales and character numbers. The combination of subject-path movement and coordinated camera motion often caters for single characters to guide the gaze. Meanwhile, static shots depict subtle performative subject movement. Through rhythmic motion design, temporal and spatial

perceptions are extended in these shots. When multi-character scenarios are involved, dynamic rhythms, such as competitive interaction between two characters or differentiated movements of multiple characters within a static frame, are used. Its key design principle is maintaining visual interest and narrative layering by avoiding excessive consistency

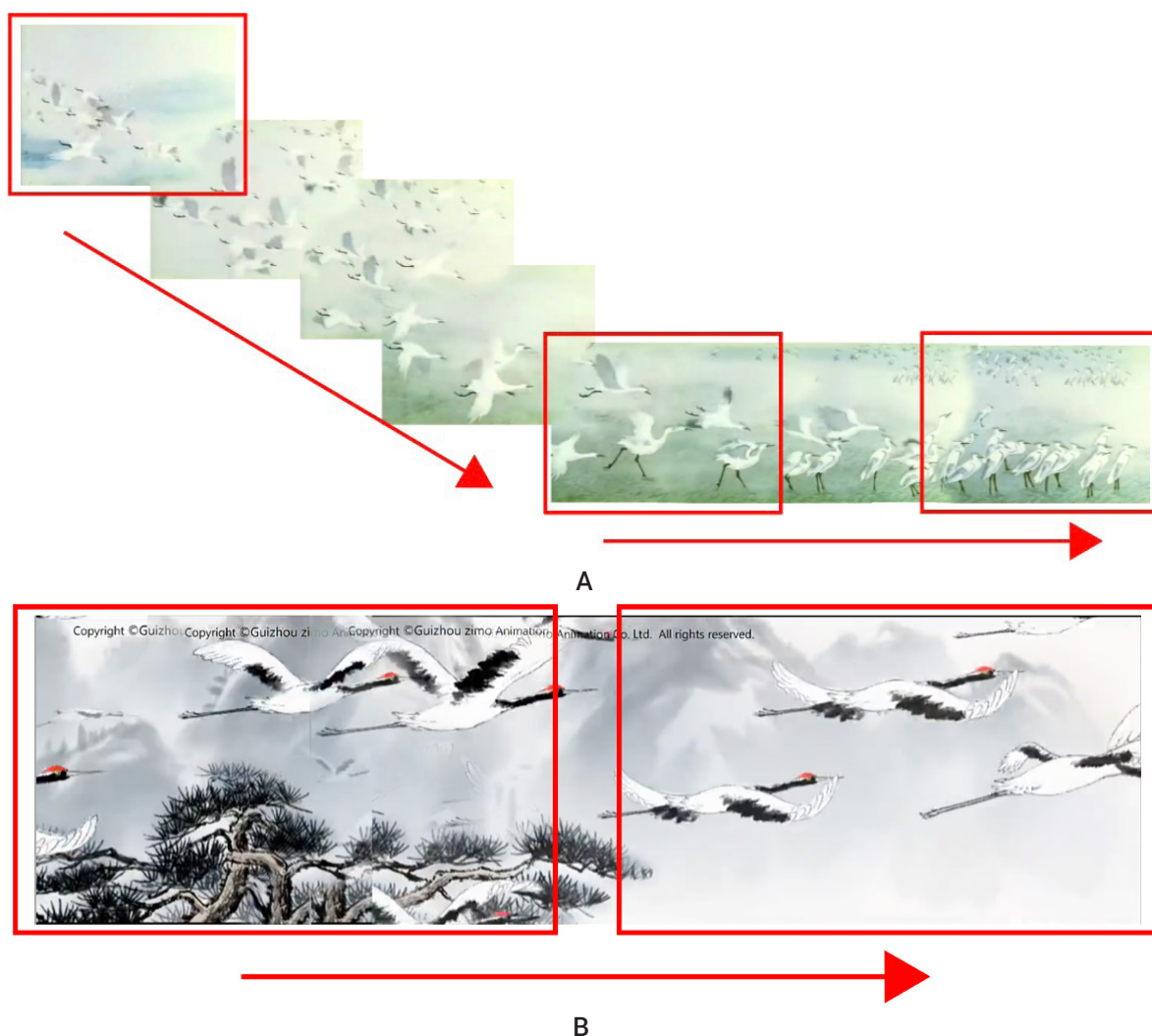


Fig. 8 Multi-subject-path movement with moving shots in (a) *The Cowboy's Flute* and (b) *Boyas Broken String*

between the camera movement and character motion. In all forms, subject movement orchestrates viewers' gaze in a nuanced manner, materialising the immersive wandering-viewing experience of traditional Chinese ink art in animated visual expression.

Frame Composition

Similar to traditional painting techniques, Chinese ink-wash animation adopts the scattered perspective (moving perspective) in frame composition, combined with the "three distances" principle. Its visual language emphasises virtual and real ("xu shi"), convergence and divergence ("ju san"), and rhythmic vitality. It captures the essence of ink painting through brush lines, boneless painting, and other classical techniques, as shown in Figure 9.

In order to achieve the visual aesthetic of creating scattered compositions, Chinese ink-wash animation predominantly uses wide and medium shots. Consequently, close-up and extreme close-up shots that focus on detailed facial expression and emotional portrayal are uncommon. Instead, emotions are primarily conveyed through body language. As in Figure 10, all three clips depict sadness. In *The Cowboy's Flute*, sadness was expressed through body language (waving the hands, bowing the head in thought, wiping tears, and reflecting) presented in a wide shot. A close-up shot in Figure 10(b) depicted embrace of reluctance and parting; such close-up emotional expression is rare in this genre. In Figure 10(c), a

medium shot captured body language to convey sorrow; the character learnt the truth, got into an embrace, and refused to leave.

Figure 11(a) depicts a scene from *Harvest*, which revealed flawed composition: the left trunk with heavy ink and dense lines, the rooster and sparse feathers on the right, and an overly empty central area create an unbalanced rhythm of heavy left/light right, a denser foreground and a looser background, and an abrupt contrast in density. Additionally, the rooster and grasshopper, similar in size and positioned at frame ends, lack distinct visual focus. Violating the traditional ink flower-and-bird principle of clear distinction between main and secondary elements (emphasised via size, position, and ink weight), both elements are in a solid state with no hierarchical layering. While extensive blank space accords with the concept of "treating blank as black", it fails to achieve "interaction between virtuality and reality"—acting as unfilled gaps, instead of implying space (e.g., air or ground) or extending artistic mood, resulting in thin visual effect.

In contrast, the analogous scene in *Little Tadpoles Search for Mama*, as shown in Figure 11(b), exhibited aesthetic balance. The black hen on the right was positioned at the right golden section: although small in size (for distant perspective), its heavy ink immediately captured the viewer's gaze. For virtuality and reality interaction, the towel gourd vines (light ink,

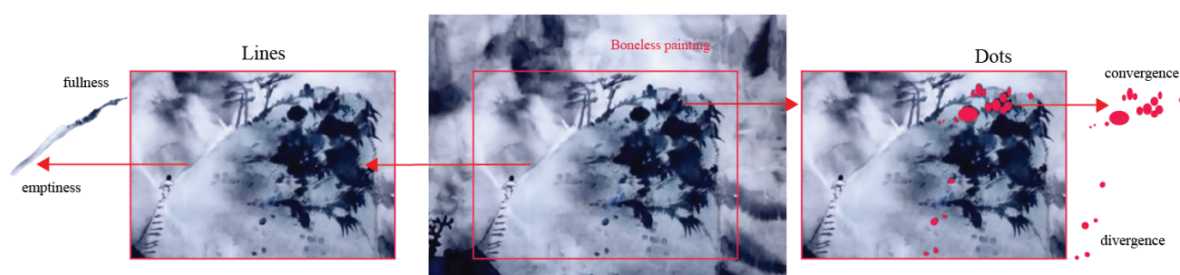


Fig. 9 Chinese traditional painting technique in *Feeling from Mountain and Water*

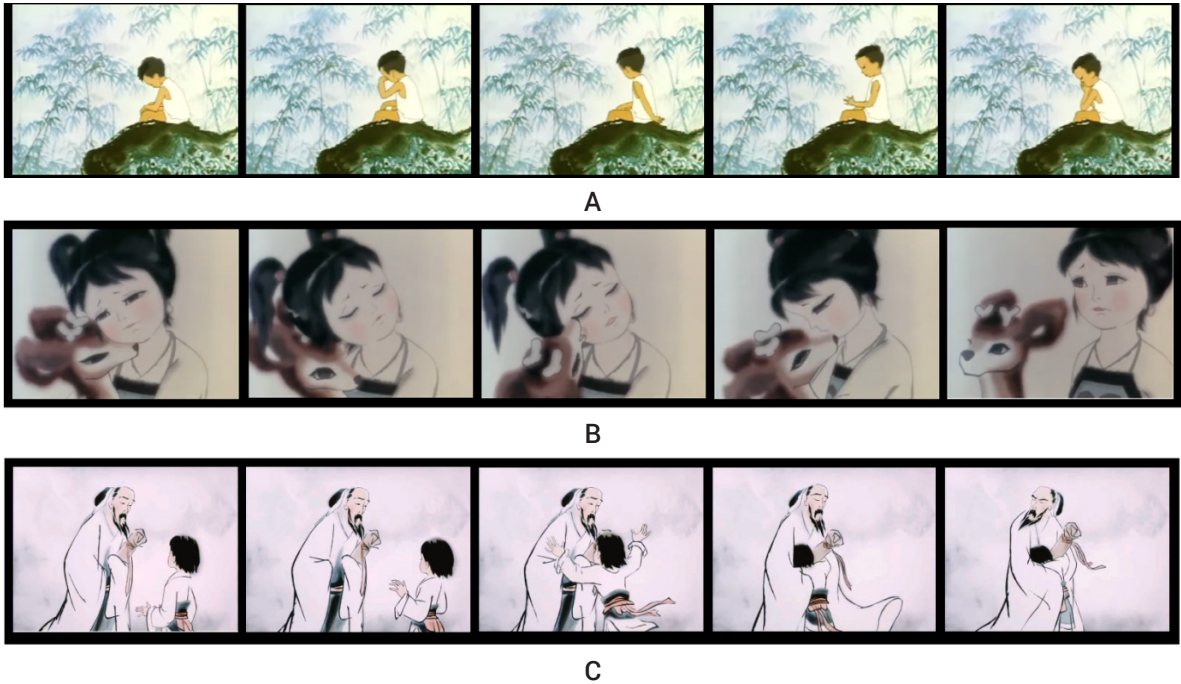


Fig. 10 Expression of emotions in Chinese ink-wash animation

fine lines) on the left set off the main subject and provided balance to the frame. Extensive blank space served as the virtual. Light-ink vine leaves contrasted with the hen's deep-ink, with the blank implying courtyard or sky space. The vines'

winding downward curves guided the gaze from upper left to lower right towards the hen, forming a natural visual flow. The hen's dynamic posture infused vitality and achieved a coherent flow of vital energy in the frame composition.



Fig. 11 Comparison of frame composition between (a) *Harvest* and (b) *Little Tadpoles Search for Mama*

Editing Rhythm

In Chinese ink-wash animation, editing serves as a key means to convey Chinese artistic conception, rhythmic vitality, and the core aesthetics of viewing scenes through movement, integrating time into spatial composition and creating scattered composition. Slow pacing and long takes extend the passage of time, allowing the viewers to fully perceive the artistic conception and vital energy of the scene. As shown in Figure 12(a), the opening sequence of *Little Tadpoles Search for Mama* guided the viewer's attention through camera panning movement, which constructed drifting visual path. However, in *Harvest*, static shots were mainly employed. As shown in Figure 12(b), its opening sequence revealed several clips cut together from the same scene and the same angle, creating a sense of interruption and undermining the

drifting visual experience. Furthermore, most sequences in *Boya's Broken String* adopted simple fade-out-to-white transition between individual scenes. Such rigid editing method cannot generate a continuous sense of "wandering-viewing", affecting the construction of spatial continuity and rhythmic artistic conception and making the outcome to resemble a slideshow decorated with an ink-wash visual style.

On the other hand, the expansion of temporal and spatial perceptions through empty-shot editing strengthens the sense of artistic conception and intended blank. For instance, referring to Figure 13(a), the shepherd boy fell asleep and dreamt that his cow chases a butterfly. In this scene, after chasing the butterfly for some time, the cow runs out of the frame, leaving the scene unchanged for approximately five seconds.

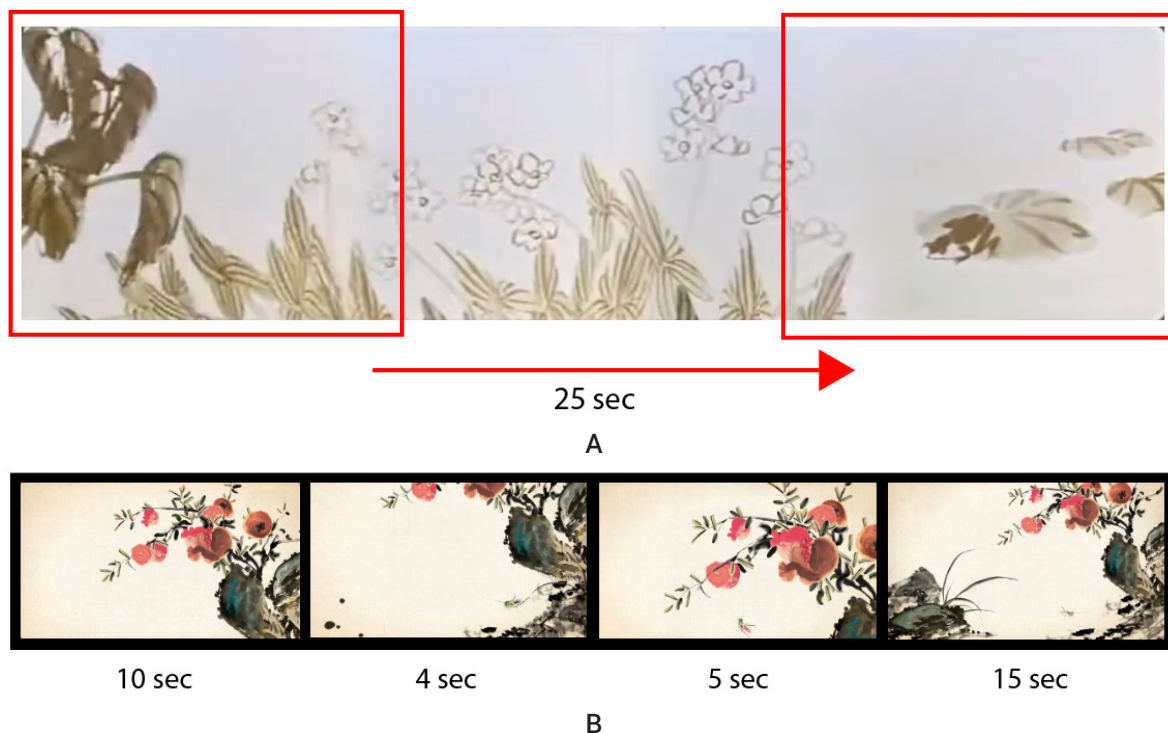


Fig. 12 Editing technique in the opening of (a) *Little Tadpoles Looking for Their Mother* and (b) *Harvest*

This brief empty space creates room for imagination—the butterfly still flies in the frame, and the cow eventually reappears in the frame. Such moment of emptiness left the viewers considerable space for reverie and enhanced the playfulness of the sequence. Although no editing cuts were involved, the sequence conveyed montage effect.

In contrast, Figure 13(b) shows three static shots of chasing a grasshopper. The chase started on the mountain (Shot 1) and continued under a rock (Shot 2). A closeup shot (Shot 3) showed that the grasshopper was caught. When the grasshopper was behind the rock, the sequence cut directly to the next shot, marking the abrupt end of the chase. The entire sequence consisted of a linear pursuit, which diminished its playfulness and offered little room for the viewer's imagination. The emotional experience of the chase was brought to an abrupt halt.

Through editing strategies like long takes and empty-shot composition, Chinese ink-wash animation effectively prolongs the sense of temporal duration and expands the perception of spatial depth. Viewers immerse themselves more deeply in the emotional atmosphere of scenes with deliberate extension of time, resulting in stronger emotional connection with the characters and the narrative. For instance, Figure

14 shows the same dramatic structure—two protagonists meeting, waiting, and reuniting. In Figure 14(a), *Feeling from Mountain and Water* employed different treatment. Shot 1 had both characters together. Shot 2 was an empty shot, indicating the passage of time. Shots 3 and 4 depicted the protagonist practising diligently. Shots 5 and 6 were again empty shots, allowing the viewers to sense the duration and feel the cold weather environment. It was not until Shot 7 that the two were together again.

Meanwhile, as shown in Figure 14(b), *Boya's Broken String* featured only three shots. Shot 1 (static shot) showed both characters together. Shot 2 (pan shot) transitioned from their encounter to the protagonist playing the zither, suggesting the passage of time. Shot 3 revealed their reunion. In this narrative, the companion passed on, with the depiction of a grave. This cinematographic approach did not allow the viewers a moment for reflection or imagination. Viewers had minimal chance to experience emotional connection with the characters.

In the dramatic structure of meeting, waiting, and reuniting, the treatment of the waiting phase differed significantly between both animations. Shot 2 in Figure 14(a) included views

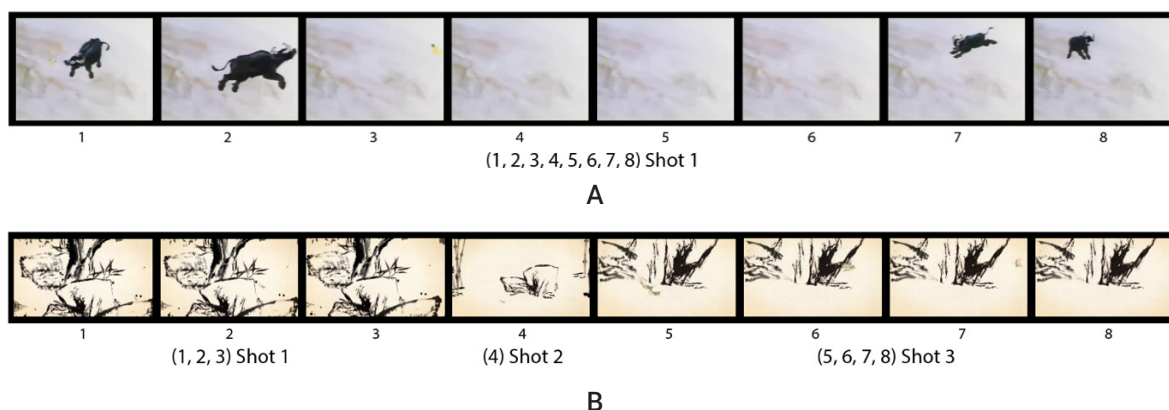


Fig. 13 Scene comparison between (a) *The Cowboy's Flute* and (b) *Harvest*

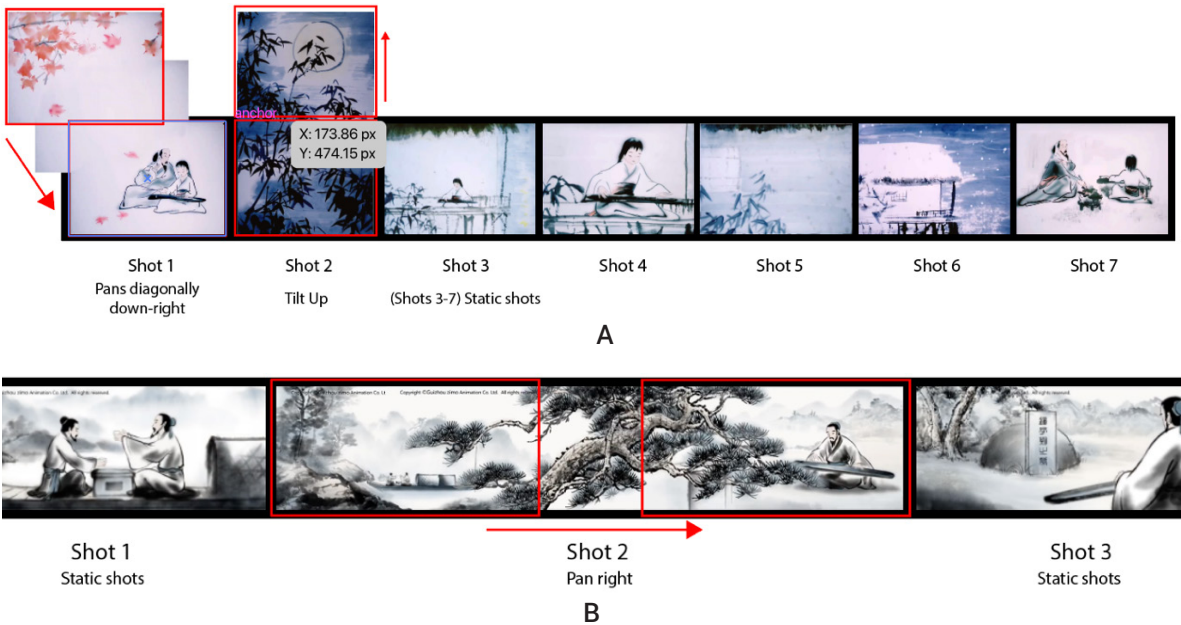


Fig. 14 Comparison of camera movement between (a) *Feeling from Mountain and Water* (1988) and (b) *Boya's Broken String* (2010)

of the moon, the protagonist playing the zither, leaves outside the house, and snow-covered scenery. This sequence enabled viewers to perceive the protagonist's dedicated practice over time. A single pan shot, shown in Figure 14(b), was used to carry the narrative. This overly concise editing failed to cultivate temporal depth, emotional resonance, or visual "wandering". Therefore, extension of time through long takes and empty shots is essential to convey Chinese artistic conception and achieve genuine emotional storytelling in ink-wash animation.

Summary of Main Cross-Case Findings

With no proposed rigid rules, recurrent formal tendencies that appeared to support or weaken the realisation of "mirroring-drifting" in Chinese ink animation are summarised in Table 1. Analysis revealed four practice-oriented modes, through which mirroring-drifting is realised in Chinese ink animation based on the interaction between camera/frame movement and subject movement as visual guidance. It also

highlighted the compositional and temporal conditions that support wandering perception, as well as the risk of over-directed spectacle caused by intrusive 3D movement and excessive fast cutting.

In Chinese ink-wash animation, the realisation of mirroring-drifting emerged to be the most effective through a combination of camera movement, subject-path movement, frame composition, and editing rhythm. Such combination produces a gradual, wandering mode of perception, guiding the viewers' gaze. Beyond narrative storytelling, the analysis of six selected works revealed that the most powerful expression of Chinese artistic conception lies not in technical sophistication or visual spectacle but in whether drifting visual attention, spatial openness, rhythmic vitality, and temporal continuity are sustained. Classical works generally exhibit these qualities more consistently. These features are clearly overlooked in some later ink-wash animations, which rely on

faster narrative pacing and involve disrupted visual continuity. This is precisely why modern Chinese ink-wash animation has struggled to regain its former artistic height, which has nothing to do with advances in animation technology.

Camera movement in classic Chinese ink-wash animation is primarily planar and gaze-guiding, focusing on progressive spatial unfolding, rather than volumetric depth or visual spectacle. Effective motions include static framing, pans, tilts, diagonal pan-tilts, mild zooms, and compound planar movements, which evoke handscroll-like wandering viewing experience. As

exemplified in *Feeling from Mountain and Water*, lateral, vertical, turning, and circular camera movements generate drifting spatial consciousness and rhythmic, painterly spectatorship. Conversely, intrusive or overly prominent camera work, such as the 360° arc shot in *Harvest*, disrupts compositional and subject integration, producing abrupt, exhibition-like effects that undermine sustained wandering-viewing.

Findings also revealed that subject–path movement is central to establishing wandering-viewing. Viewers' gaze is primarily guided by the directional motion of characters and

Table 1 Summary of Cross-Case Findings on Mirroring-Drifting in Chinese Ink Animation

Dimensions	Methods	Cases	Conception Functions	Rarely Used/Less Compatible Methods
Camera movement	Static, pan, tilt, diagonal tilt-pan, circular tilt-pan, turning tilt-pan, free-style tilt-pan, selective zoom, and combined movements	Figure 3 and Figure 4	Builds drifting spatial perception; the scene unfolds progressively, like reading a handscroll, rather than viewing a fixed space; viewing scenes through movement	Spectacular 3D-style dolly/tracking or orbiting shots used mainly for display, rather than guided viewing
Subject movement	Single characters use either subtle micro-movements or curved/circular paths to guide vision. Multiple characters adopt coordinated, competitive, staggered, or clustered movement, with a strong emphasis on staggered timing for visual rhythm and depth.	Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7, and Figure 8	The viewer's gaze is guided by the character's behaviour and movement path, rather than dialogue, with the rhythm of bodily movements extending the sense of time and space.	Dialogue-led exposition, overly synchronised movement, or exact camera-subject matching that flattens visual interest
Frame composition	Predominantly wide and medium shots; clear main-secondary relations; emptiness and fullness ("xushi"); convergence and divergence ("jusan"); scattered perspective; intended blankness ("liubai")	Figure 9, Figure 10, and Figure 11	Creates layered spatial depth and breathing room; balances the real and the void while allowing the gaze to drift among elements; create scattered compositions	Dominant close-ups, fixed linear perspective, centralised focal composition, and densely filled frames
Editing rhythm	Slow pacing, long takes, dissolve/fade transition, and empty-shot editing	Figure 12, Figure 13, and Figure 14	Realises "time-leading space"; prolongs duration, deepens artistic conception, spiritual rhythm, rhythmic vitality, leaving room for reflection and imagination; integrating time into spatial composition	Fast-cut continuity editing, time-compressing montage, jump cuts, cutaways, and cross-cutting

creatures (e.g., animals, children, birds, and fishes), rather than dialogue or fast narrative cues. Curved, circular, staggered, and multidirectional paths effectively provide rhythmic visual guidance and avoid linear simplicity, as seen in the flowing, brushwork-like movement in *Little Tadpoles Search for Mama* and the drifting perceptual paths shaped by birds and the shepherd boy in *Feeling from Mountain and Water*. The visual depth and appeal of multi-subject scenes are also maintained through the use of staggered rhythms. Visuals become less flattering and engaging when the movement between camera and subjects are excessively synchronised or when rhythm and direction are uniform. Hence, subject–path movement, especially when it is coordinated but not rigidly matched with camera movement, serves as a key formal foundation for mirroring-drifting.

Thirdly, with the emphasis on frame composition and spatial organisation, findings revealed rich artistic conception in Chinese ink-wash animation through the adoption of classical Chinese painting principles, including scattered perspective, the “three distances” principle, the balance between virtual and real, intentional blankness, and rhythmic convergence and divergence. The analysed works revealed the dominance of wide and medium shots with few close-ups. Their scenic breadth, layered depth, and visual breathing space were retained. The effective use of spatial layers, ink contrast, and blank space in *Feeling from Mountain and Water* and *Little Tadpoles Search for Mama* creates vivid, poetic visual fields. Meanwhile, *Harvest* featured weaker composition due to unclear subject hierarchy, inexpressive blank space, and imbalanced density and openness. Overall, effective composition in ink-wash animation relies on allowing the image to breathe and the gaze to drift, rather than dense filling of the frame.

The fourth finding highlighted that editing rhythm is essential for conveying Chinese artistic conception, as it governs how time gradually unfolds space. Effective editing in classic ink-wash animation favours slow pacing, long takes, empty shots,

and gentle transitions, instead of quick cuts or compressed montage. *Little Tadpoles Search for Mama*, *The Cowboy's Flute*, and particularly, *Feeling from Mountain and Water* employed sustained shots, empty scenes, and quiet transitions to support drifting vision and contemplation. In contrast, *Harvest* employed short static cuts that break perceptual flow, while *Boya's Broken String* relied on repetitive fades that create disjointed, slideshow-like effect. The study concluded the achievement of richer artistic conception when editing gives viewers time to dwell, imagine, and engage emotionally with the scene.

Analysis showed a clear cross-case pattern. Successful realisation of mirroring-drifting is more likely to feature four formal conditions: (1) planar camera movement that unfolds space gradually; (2) subject–path movement that guides visual attention rhythmically; (3) frame composition based on the scattered perspective and the balance of emptiness and fullness; (4) editing rhythm that preserves duration and spatial continuity. *Feeling from Mountain and Water* featured the best integration of all four conditions. Chinese artistic conception was also strongly embodied in *Little Tadpoles Search for Mama* and *The Cowboy's Flute*. Meanwhile, *Harvest* and *Boya's Broken String* revealed the inadequacy of superficial ink-wash appearance without appropriate movement, compositional space, and temporal rhythm for wandering-viewing.

Discussion

Analysis revealed mirroring-drifting as a core principle, not merely a cinematic technique, which mediates the translation of Chinese artistic conception into animation. It theoretically establishes a pathway from “Dao” and “jing jie” to “kong”, “qi”, and their expressive method, with mirroring-drifting embodying traditional aesthetic ontology that blurs rigid boundaries between the self and world, as well as perception and space. Findings on the use of shot movement, composition, and editing rhythm in this study further expanded the discourse

of “kong” and “qi”. The former reflects spatial openness, intentional blankness, compositional breathing, and perceptual space, while rhythmic vitality, including subject movement, camera motion, editing flow, and the film’s temporal rhythm, convey the latter. Hence, the interaction of spatial openness and temporal rhythm produces Chinese artistic conception,

not just visual content. Besides that, as a perceptual mode in Chinese ink-wash animation, wandering-viewing can be viewed as a drifting perceptual gaze that invites viewers’ gaze to roam the scene. In such cases, movement structures attention, sustains atmosphere, and deepens the connection between the viewer and the image. In other words,

Table 2 Creative Guidance Framework for Chinese Artistic Conception and Mirroring-Drifting in Chinese Ink-Wash Animation

	Performative Subject Movement	Subject–Path Movement
Static shots	Creative features Require more attention and thoughtful effort in the design of performative subject movement Caution Avoid keeping the frame completely motionless for too long	Creative features Require more attention and thoughtful effort in the design of single or multiple subjects motion path Caution Do not limit subject–path movement to straight-line motion. More effective strategies include curved or multidirectional movement.
Moving shots	Creative features Performative single or multi-subject movement while the camera unfolds space through pan, tilt, reveal, or return movement Mirroring-drifting may be strengthened by changing the single or multiple subjects while maintaining continuous camera movement. Caution Avoid overly intense camera movements; otherwise, the aesthetic of mirroring-drifting is likely to be reduced to a sense of visual impact.	Creative features The coordination between camera movement and the single or multi-subject–path movement produces the fullest realisation of mirroring-drifting Caution When camera movement and single or multi-subject–path movement share the same directional flow and rhythm Animators should incorporate staggered movements or contrarian dynamic elements, as such deliberate integration of staggered/contrarian motion elements can help maintain visual variety.
Frame composition/ spatial organisation	Creative features The composition should support visible motion paths across a scenic field through scattered perspective, layered depth, and directional relations among foreground, middle ground, and background. Sufficient blank or transitional space should be left for wandering-viewing. Caution Avoid crowded framing, dominant close-ups, over-centred blocking, over-symmetrical compositions, or over-blankness, and spatial breathing	
Editing rhythm/ time-leading space	Creative features Editing should uphold temporal continuity, gentle pacing, and sufficient duration to highlight gestures, pauses, and stillness through long takes, slow cuts, and soft transitions for the gaze to follow directional change, layered drift, and scenic transition. Caution Avoid rapid, discontinuous editing and over-syncopated montage Preserve restrained movement and perceptual flow Avoid editing that serves to speed up the plot	
Suggested emphasis	In this study, subject–path movement emerged as the stronger creative focus because it directly supported wandering-viewing, camera-guided drifting, and the viewer’s path-based attention.	

wandering-viewing is not confined to painting but can be extended to Chinese ink-wash animation as a temporal-spatial spectatorship logic.

Based on the discussed findings, a Creative Guidance Framework (Table 2) was derived for the realisation of Chinese artistic conception and mirroring-drifting in Chinese ink-wash animation. This proposed framework incorporated four key dimensions, namely camera movement, subject–path movement, frame composition and spatial organisation, and editing rhythm. From a practical stance, it does not function as a rigid production formula. Instead, it translates abstract philosophical ideas into a practice-oriented model or formal expression through an art form that unfolds space through time, informing both critical analysis and future creative practice in Chinese ink-wash animation.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated the expression of Chinese artistic conception in Chinese ink-wash animation, most effectively through the coordinated formal realisation of space, rhythm, movement, and duration, not through painterly appearance alone. The proposed framework linked Dao, “jing jie”, “kong” and “qi”, “you guan”, and “jing you” to the four core dimensions of camera movement, subject–path movement, frame composition, and editing rhythm. Findings further indicated the significance of drifting camera movement, gaze-guiding subject paths, breathing composition, and slow durational editing in the visual realisation of Chinese artistic conception in ink-wash animation. Based on these findings, it is evident that future Chinese ink-wash animation should not rely on ink texture or “national style” imagery alone. Deeper formal conditions of Chinese artistic conception, such as drifting visual guidance, layered composition, restrained editing rhythm, and the gradual unfolding of space, should be taken into consideration, particularly when it comes to AI-assisted and digitally accelerated production, where the risk of reducing

Chinese aesthetics to mere decorative surface may become even more pronounced.

Theoretically, this study clarified the translation of Chinese aesthetic thought into animation analysis through a layered structure of ontology, aesthetic realisation, and formal expression. This study's Creative Guidance Framework for Chinese artistic conception and mirroring-drifting in Chinese ink-wash animation served as key practical contribution, offering a structured model for both critical interpretation and future creative production. Despite the study's narrow focus on a selected corpus and a formal interpretive method, findings revealed that the enduring significance of Chinese ink-wash animation lies in its ability to transform traditional ideas of unity, emptiness, vitality, and wandering perception into contemporary visual experience.

As this study analysed selected few films, the discussed findings were not representative of the entire history of Chinese ink-wash animation. Moreover, the conducted analysis was formal and interpretive, instead of viewer-centred focus. Considering that, it is recommended for future research to explore the perceptions of viewers from different cultural backgrounds towards wandering-viewing, spatial openness, and rhythmic vitality. Besides that, the proposed framework specifically focused on Chinese ink-wash animation. However, future research can consider exploring, testing, refining, and expanding the framework's applicability in other Chinese art-influenced moving-image forms or across different media and historical periods.

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